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"The Tai are of Mongolian race. They came from China and formed various groups, including the Laotians (and the Siamese) and the predominant ethnical group in Upper Tonking. Their numbers are assessed at a million. They are of less than average height (1.59 metres). As a people they are very gay and hospitable. Like the Cambodians, the Laotians are Buddhists, but their religious sense goes hand in hand with very great moral freedom. They are indifferent farmers but engage frequently in fishing and hunting and are excellent boatmen. As traders they possess remarkable qualities.

For a long time the Laotian was considered as an apathetic creature, hating all effort and anxious only to enjoy the present without worrying about the morrow or without trying to improve his moral well-being or his material existence by persevering labour. It cannot be denied that this people, whose country was repeatedly laid waste throughout the centuries by invasions from the north and the west, seemed at the time of our arrival in Indo-China to be doomed to decadence. . . At the present time the country has roads and tracks, and its doors are open to commercial and industrial undertakings which have already done much for the development of the land and its mineral wealth. The local authorities have no difficulty in securing the very active co-operation of the inhabitants in the construction of roads and tracks. . . The legend

of the Laotian as an idle creature, exercising passive resistance to any attempt to make use of his intelligence or his physical labour, had disappeared. Far from taking no interest in public welfare as was long asserted, the Laotians on the contrary seem to take a lively interest in it, and in particular in the progress of the development of the country and of the schools and medical institutions that are being established. (2)

2. Léon Archimbaud: Rapport au nom de la Commission des finances sur le budget général des Colonies (1928), pp. 88-89.

— This point of view is confirmed by the following statement:

'It has been repeatedly alleged that the Laotian abhors work and does only what is strictly necessary to provide for his own needs and for those of his family. He is said to have two serious defects: a very idle mind and a hatred of effort. This view is mistaken. It is certainly true that there is a certain fundamental apathy and indolence about the Laotian but this can be quite naturally explained by his background and the circumstances

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in which his material existence has so far been passed.

'Times have now changed, the country is entirely pacified and war and piracy are merely a memory. . . . Exports of raw materials which were practically non-existent a mere 15 years ago are now increasing rapidly and this is clearly proof that the Laotian worker is not, as has been said, indifferent to gain, but that he can collaborate effectively with the settlers.

'The whole question is one of making use of his services in a manner suited to his special mentality, customs, qualities and defects. It is essential to treat him fairly and kindly; his intelligence and his docility of character enable him to adapt himself gradually to modern working methods. The tin mines in the province of Cammon have for several years been employing Laotian workers who have proved completely satisfactory both for mining the ore and for its treatment.

'Similarly, in connection with road making, in Upper and Lower Laos groups of workers have been used for cutting down

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trees and clearing away stumps and undergrowth in the heart of a mountainous country where conditions of work are difficult and resources are slight. Under the skilful direction of our administrators and engineers the use of Laotian labour has proved satisfactory in almost every case.' (M. Bosc: Rapport d'ensemble sur le Laos. Conference on Native Communities held at the International Colonial Exhibition, Paris, 1931.) "